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The Popes Condemn Anti-Semitism

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THE COUNCIL AGAINST INTOLERANCE IN AMERICA

I N T R O D U C T I O N

By HON. W. WARREN BARBOUR

United States Senator from New Jersey

An address delivered by the Rev. Dr. Maurice S. Sheehy, head of the Department of Religious Education at the Catholic University of America on Tuesday, March 14th at 10:45 P.M. over National Network Columbia Broadcasting System, under the auspices of The Council Against Intolerance in America. Dr. Sheehy was introduced by the Hon. W. Warren Barbour, United States Senator from New Jersey.

The growing unrest and intolerance taking place in Europe and Asia today probably have done more than anything else to closely coordinate and unite all religious activity in the United States, and to bring forth a greater and truer feeling of brotherhood and understanding among members of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths. At a time when all human tolerance is fast disappearing from so large a part of the world, the great fundamentals upon which this nation of ours was founded take on increasing significance and new value. An evidence of this awakening is seen in widespread movements already under way in our country to protect and preserve the fundamentals of our representative form of democracy. One of these organizations is the Council against Intolerance in America of which I have the honor to be a member of the Executive Committee. A council composed of leaders throughout the nation embracing all religious faiths and political affiliations banded together to preserve those rights for which humanity has struggled through the ages—rights which still remain in this country of ours and must at all costs be forever preserved.

It is of special significance tonight that we are to have the pleasure and privilege of hearing from the Reverend Father Sheehy, Head of the Department of Religious Education of the Catholic University in Washington. Father Sheehy, who has devoted his life to the broad and enlightening field of education and religion, has as his topic tonight, "The Popes Condemn Anti-Semitism." His message is especially appropriate at this time.

THE POPES CONDEMN ANTI - SEMITISM

IT IS a source of great happiness for me to avail myself of the invitation of the Council Against Intolerance in America to trace in brief outline the role that the Papacy has played in opposing that vicious form of intolerance known as Anti-Semitism. This talk, I believe, is opportune since during the past two months twelve pieces of scurrilous anti-Semitic literature have come to my desk from anonymous sources. We Catholics have, during the past few weeks, witnessed an outpouring of sympathy and good-will on the part of our non-Catholic neighbors in America on the occasion of the death of Pope Pius XI, the Pope of Peace. One might hope that the death-knell for religious intolerance might be sounded in this country, but as long as one small religious group is misrepresented by vicious and irresponsible forces, religious liberty is not fully assured our country.

The first Popes said nothing about anti-Semitism since they themselves, like their Master Christ, were Jews and subject to all the injustices heaped upon Jews. As early as the sixth century—in the year 538—Pope Gregory the Great wrote: “We forbid you to molest the Jews or to lay upon them restrictions not imposed by the established laws; we further permit them to live as Romans and to dispose of their property as they will.”

Sad to relate, Pope Gregory in his Christlike attitude had to oppose some fanatical bishops of his time.

A later papal document, very probably from the pen of Calixtus II, was a charter of protection to the Jews. It contained these four propositions:

1. The Jews are not to be coerced into Christianity.
2. No one is to injure them in life or limb or to take away their property or to interfere with such customary rights as they have enjoyed in the places where they live.
3. They are not to be attacked on festival occasions nor compelled to render feudal services beyond what is customary.
4. The cemeteries of the Jews must be zealously protected. This charter was reissued and confirmed by some twenty or thirty pontiffs over a period of four hundred years. And yet there were occasionally documents concerning the Jews which seem to reflect more the prejudices of their times than the traditional attitude of the Papacy. The Bull ‘Cum Nimis Absurdum’ of Paul IV, constraining the Jews to live in ghettos is a case in point. Yet a defense of that particular procedure might be urged as a protective measure in a time of great unrest. Heinrich Graetz, Jewish historian and author of a monumental work, “History of the Jews”, writes: “It is remarkable that the Bishops of Rome, the recognized champions of Christianity, treated the Jews with the utmost toleration and liberality. The occupants of the Papal throne shielded the Jews and exhorted the clergy and the princes against the use of force in converting them to Christianity.”

Too few historians of mediaeval times recognize the fact that the Popes had a twofold responsibility—one as spiritual and the other as political leaders. The Holy See never looked upon those unbaptized as its spiritual subjects. The Popes as sovereigns of a temporal state had an official relationship with the Jews who were citizens of that state.

In the Middle Ages Jews of all Christian countries looked to the Holy

See for protection. More than one of the Popes, beginning with Innocent IV, issued decrees exonerating the Jews from the calumny of ritual murder—a lie comparable only in viciousness to that alleged against the Christians in the first ages of Christianity. At the time of the worst excesses of the Spanish Inquisition, Sixtus IV and Clement VII exerted themselves to check the severities exercised against convert Jews. In 1255 Gregory IX issued a Bull reproving the false accusations against the Jews. This was addressed to the clergy, nobles, and lords of France. This document is so significant as a portrayal of the attitude of the Popes that I beg leave to quote it at some length:

“Certain of the clergy, and princes, nobles, and great lords of your cities and dioceses have falsely devised certain godless plans against the Jews, unjustly depriving them by force of their property, and appropriating it themselves. . . . In their malice they ascribe every murder, wherever it chance to occur, to the Jews. And on the ground of these and other fabrications, they are filled with rage against them, rob them of their possessions without any formal accusation, without confession, without legal trial and conviction, contrary to the privilege granted them by the Apostolic See. They oppress the Jews by starvation, imprisonment and by tortures and sufferings; they afflict them with all kinds of punishments, and sometimes even condemn them to death, so that the Jews, although living under Christian princes, are in a worse plight than were their ancestors in the land of the Pharaohs. . . . We ordain that you behave toward them in a friendly and kind manner. Whenever any unjust attacks upon them come under your notice, redress their injuries, and do not suffer them to be visited in the future by similar tribulations.” (So far the words of Pope Gregory IX.)

In 1273 the scene of outrages against the Jews shifted to England, then of course a Catholic country, and Gregory X took up their defense, ordering that no injury be inflicted upon their persons or their property. In 1389 a strong protest against persecution of the Jewish people came from Boniface IX. One of the outrageous things attempted was to coerce the Jews into giving up their faith, and almost every form of compulsion seems to have been employed. This impelled Pope Martin V in the beginning of the fifteenth century, to decree as follows:

“Whereas the Jews are made to the image and likeness of God and a portion of them one day will be saved and whereas they have besought our protection; following in the footsteps of our predecessors we com-

mand that they be not molested in their synagogues; that their laws, rights, and customs be not assailed; that they be not baptized by force, constrained to observe Christian festivals, nor to wear badges, and they be not hindered in their business relations with Christians.”

Sad to relate, the plea of the Holy Father was ignored then, even as allegedly civilized rulers chose to ignore the pleas of Pope Pius in our own day.

A fact of more than passing significance is that many of the Popes had Jewish physicians, particularly at a time when poisoning was a fine art and as an eminent Catholic scholar, Father James Gillis, has pointed out, “It would almost seem that certain Popes, like Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X (the Medici of the Renaissance), and Clement VII, felt themselves safer in the hands of Jews than of Catholics.”

After the division of Christendom in the sixteenth century, the Popes were more concerned with the struggle to preserve the unity of the Christian religion than with the challenge to Christian tolerance presented in occasional outbreaks against the Jews.

Shortly after his coronation, Pope Pius IX was riding thru Rome when his carriage was held up by a crowd surrounding a man who had fallen to the ground in a fit. “What is it?” asked the Pope. “Only a Jew”, answered a bystander. “Is he not a man and your brother?” asked the Pope sharply and, stepping from his carriage, he drove the sick Jew to his home, leaving him with a present and his blessing. The story does not end there. A delegation of Jewish people called later on Pope Pius IX to thank him and gave him as a memento a beautiful chalice.

In our day, intolerance toward Jews has either masked itself under the guise of racism or it has been uncamouflaged religious bigotry. In regard to the former, Pope Pius XI declared on July 30, 1938, referring to the unscientific (if not demented) racial theories of Naziism:

“It is forgotten that humankind, the whole of humankind, is a single, great universal human race. All men are, above all, members of the same great kind. They all belong to the single great family of the living. Humankind is, therefore, a single universal race.

A few weeks previously Pope Pius XI had denounced another manifestation of racism in these words:

"There has appeared in the Italian press in recent days an Italian racial credo prepared by a group of university professors under government auspices. The proclamations of this credo include: That great races and small races exist; that the concept of a race is a partly biological one; that the majority of the Italian population are of 'Aryan' origin; that movements of races in history are purely legendary; that a pure Italian race now exists; that it is time that Italians proclaimed themselves racists; that it is necessary to make a definite distinction between European Mediterraneans and Orientals and Africans; that Jews do not belong to the Italian race; that the purely physical and psychological European qualities of Italians must not be altered in any way."

Under the direction of Pius XI, who assumed to himself the office of Prefect of the Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, went instructions in which all Catholic teachers were urged: "diligently to arm themselves from biology, history, philosophy, apologetics, and jurisprudence, to refute stoutly and skilfully these doctrines:

"1. Vigor of race and purity of blood must be conserved and fostered at any cost; and whatever leads to this end is by that very fact justifiable.

"2. It is from blood, wherein the genius of the race is contained, that all intellectual and moral qualities flow as from their most potent source.

"3. Religion is subservient to race and must be adapted to it.

"4. The prime source and supreme rule of the whole order of justice is race instinct."

Sad indeed is the fact that never has the sight of intolerance more grieved the Papacy than in our day, but happy the circumstance that we have until recently enjoyed the dauntless leadership of Pope Pius XI. Time and again he condemned anti-Semitism. In September 1938, addressing a group of Belgian pilgrims, our Holy Father said:

"Abraham is called our patriarch, our ancestor. Anti-Semitism is not compatible with the sublime reality of this text; it is a movement which we Christians can not share. . . . No, it is not possible for Christians to take part in anti-Semitism. We are Semites spiritually."

Certainly no clearer statement could be expected from the head of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XI states in the simplest possible terms

that to be a Christian and to be anti-Jewish are incompatible terms. "Master, which is the great Commandment of the Law?" Jesus was once asked. And He replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole mind and thy whole soul; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The essence of the Christian religion is love, even though some nominally Christian are subtle agents of anti-Jewish propaganda.

On September 25, 1938, the Church through the Congregation of the Holy Office, issued this declaration:

"The Catholic Church habitually prays for the Jewish people who were the bearers of the divine revelations up to the time of Christ. . . . Actuated by this love, the Apostolic See has protected this people against unjust oppression and, just as every kind of envy and jealousy among the nations must be disapproved of, so in an especial manner must be that hatred which is generally termed anti-Semitism."

"We are Semites spiritually." What did the recently deceased Pope mean by these words? Perhaps from my own priestly experience of today I can suggest an answer. The essence of Catholic worship is the Mass. In the Mass there are readings from the Law of Moses, the psalms, the prophecies. The Divine office which every priest is obligated to say daily contains all the psalms and excerpts from every book of the Old Testament. Catholic life is enriched by and flows out of the heritage of Jewish religious culture. As a Catholic I salute the Jew as my spiritual ancestor, who preserved belief in one God in hard, cruel times, who worshipped and still worships the true God.

Only two days have elapsed since Pope Pius XII has taken over the chair of Peter. But I know—and the anti-Semitic leaders of Europe know—that the former Secretary of State of Pope Pius XI will spare no effort to rid the world of a hatred that shakes the foundations of civilization.

In America we all, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, have learned to live side by side in peace and understanding. There are forces operating in our day to arouse racial and religious animosities. The Council

Against Intolerance, under the auspices of which I speak this evening, is striving diligently to get at the causes of this intolerance and to eradicate them, since they have no place in the American way of life. Won't you help us? Perhaps a first step should be an examination of conscience by every American to determine whether or no ill-will finds a resting place in his heart, and then we might all ponder these words in the Book of Proverbs:

"Six things there are which the Lord hateth, and the seventh his soul detesteth; Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked plots, feet that are swift to run to mischief, a deceitful witness that uttereth lies, and him that soweth discord among brethren."

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TO COMBAT INTOLERANCE

Americans have been shocked by Nazi persecution of religious minorities in Germany. They know that homes have been broken, children orphaned, churches and synagogues desecrated. The fruits of business, labor, science, the arts and religion have been destroyed. Americans are saddened by this spectacle and they are alarmed. For, in the United States there already exist highly organized and well-financed groups which are flooding the country with the pernicious propaganda of intolerance. In our press and on our radio they are even now fomenting hatred and destroying harmony.

The Council Against Intolerance in America has come into being for the express purpose of combatting this menace, and maintaining the racial and religious fellowship implicit in our democracy. The Council's program indicates its scope. The Council's activities are designed to meet the attacks of bigotry with factual analysis and by means of educational material to be distributed through every avenue of communication.

Every American will recognize the importance of this work and the necessity for speed in carrying it forward. To make this program possible funds are urgently needed. The Council invites all those who cherish the principles of human equality and religious liberty upon which our national life is based, to contribute to its work. It urges immediate use of the attached form in making this contribution and as evidence of moral and material support.

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